

## COVID-19 Vaccine: Fears, Hesitation, and Access: What the Black Community Needs to Know

### Q: Where can I go to get the vaccine?

**A (Dr. Meika Neblett and Dr. Tanisha Taylor):** The vaccine roll out has made many people feel left out and bewildered. Here is a long list of different places to call. Put your name on the list everywhere you qualify - and your number will come up!

- **Local vaccination sites**, including community centers, hospitals, local health departments, medical clinics, pharmacies and vaccination events, can be found on the state's online [COVID-19 Vaccine Locations page](#).
- Sign up for the state's [Vaccine Scheduling System](#), which helps you find vaccination providers to pre-register for an appointment. The state system notifies you when appointments become available, but you must book one yourself.
- **County megasites** operate in [Atlantic](#), [Bergen](#), [Burlington](#), [Gloucester](#), [Middlesex](#) and [Morris](#) Counties. Each of these sites has a different registration process.
- **A federally backed community site** is set to open at the New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark on March 29. It will operate every day for eight weeks, with capacity to administer 6,000 doses per day. More information to come.
- **Retail pharmacy chains** — including [CVS](#) (and some of its Target-based pharmacies), [Rite Aid](#) and [ShopRite](#) — have created online COVID-19 vaccine pages where you can register and search for appointments across their locations.
- **Veterans Affairs facilities are [vaccinating veterans, spouses and veteran caregivers](#)**. Those enrolled in the VA health care system get priority; additional appointments will go to others who are eligible based on their age, health problems and other factors that increase their COVID-19 risk. [Sign up with VA](#) to get updates on vaccine availability and to be notified when you can make an appointment.
- **The state's COVID-19 call center at 855-568-0545** can answer questions about the Vaccine Scheduling System from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily, in more than 240 languages. The call center's ability to schedule appointments for callers has been paused temporarily. Alternatively, you can [submit an online form](#) if you need support.
- **The state's seniors-specific call center at 856-249-7007** can assist those 65 and older with registering for, scheduling and rescheduling appointments from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily.

**Q: When you experience hesitancy from your patients, how do you address it?**

**A (Dr. Keiron Greaves):** When I experience hesitancy in my patients of color regarding the vaccine, we discuss their apprehension, which is based on a lack of trust in the government and our healthcare system, which has exploited black bodies in the past, and the belief that the vaccine was made too quickly. I reassure them that the vaccine was made expeditiously but there were no steps that were skipped. Tremendous funding by the government enabled the steps taken in vaccine development to be done simultaneously instead of sequentially. The technology for mRNA vaccines was already in development and being utilized, and this was a perfect opportunity to use new and safe technology. We also discuss the fact that Pfizer had around 44,000 people in their human trials and Moderna had almost 30,000 people in their trials. In both cases, almost 10% were African Americans - more than any other vaccine trial ever done previously - to be sure the vaccine was effective for everyone. There were also panels of African American doctors, scientists, social scientists and others who were able to review the data throughout all phases of vaccine development. I try to reassure my patients that the vaccine is safe and effective.

**Q: I read that the vaccine was only good for three to six months and that there is a push to get everyone in that time to stop the spread. What happens after six months? Do you have to get another one or do you get another one around the same time as the flu vaccine?**

**A (Dr. Mary Gayle Flannelly):** (Dr. Mary Gayle Flannelly): According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), we don't know how long protection lasts for those who have been vaccinated for COVID-19. But experts are working to learn more about both natural immunity and vaccine-induced immunity. The CDC will keep the public informed as new evidence becomes available. Therefore, you don't need to get the vaccine again in six months to protect yourself from COVID-19, but scientists are watching the variants of COVID-19 and there may be a booster shot in the future because of the variants.

We want to get everyone vaccinated as soon as possible to decrease the number of people who could contract Covid and become seriously ill, thereby increasing their risk of hospitalization and death from Covid. Getting the shot also slows the spread of Covid which slows the spread of variants.

It is important for everyone getting the COVID-19 shot to know that it takes two weeks after your last shot (or two weeks after the single Johnson and Johnson shot) for your body to become fully vaccinated. Remember, during these two weeks it is very important that you continue to wear a mask, wash your hands and keep socially distanced especially as the highly contagious European variant has become the dominant variant at this time.

**Q: Do you recommend this vaccine for autoimmune disease, celiac disease, or sickle cell disease? How close to flare-ups?**

**A (Dr. Tanisha Taylor):** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists sickle cell disease (SCD) as one of the populations vulnerable to severe COVID-19. Sickle cell disease raises the risk for serious problems with COVID-19, especially when compared to the same age in the general population.

People with sickle cell disease should receive COVID-19 vaccination. The benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks for people with SCD. Vaccination is worthwhile compared to the risks of having COVID-19 disease in people with SCD (MARAC Statement, Dec 2020). Persons with a diagnosis of thalassemia are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine (bccdc.ca, 2020).

**Q:** Why is it so hard for people of color to get the vaccine in NJ?

**A (Dr. Keiron Greaves):** It's difficult for people of color to get the vaccine in New Jersey because New Jersey has to do a better job of placing vaccine hubs in predominantly black communities. They have started this process but it has to be done more aggressively, holding vaccine clinics in more churches, more community centers and holding more vaccine drives. We also need more 24/7 vaccine hubs in these neighborhoods. For Black Americans who are also disproportionately in front line jobs and categorized as essential, it's likely more difficult for them to request time off to get a vaccine. Mobile or pop-up vaccination centers and walk-in clinics that don't require online appointments would be helpful. The fact that vaccine registration is online is part of the problem, as there is often a racial divide in who has reliable internet access. The sooner we are able to get the vaccine to our primary care doctors offices and health clinics, the sooner we will get more people in these communities to be vaccinated.